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Northeast Region
U.S. Department of the Interior

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NPS begins the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route Study

The National Park Service is pleased to announce the beginning of a study authorized by Congress through the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Heritage Act of 2000 (PL106-473). The purpose of the study is to determine if the route is eligible to become a National Historic Trail. If the National Park Service determines that the route is nationally and historically significant, retains its integrity and has the potential for public recreation, Congress could designate the route a National Historic Trail. Meeting these criteria could enable the National Park Service to support groups, projects and activities associated with the trail's preservation and interpretation. The study will also identify alternative management options to preserve and interpret this important part of our heritage.

Tasks of the study will include writing an historical narrative, bibliography, and resource inventory; conducting field reconnaissance; reaching out to stakeholders; holding public meetings and a scholars' seminar; presenting the Determination of National Significance Report to the NPS Advisory Board; developing and costing alternatives, with and without NPS involvement in preserving and interpreting the route; and completing an environmental assessment or impact statement if the route is determined to be nationally significant.

During the study, we will consult with interested individuals, groups, and State Historic Preservation Offices to identify the range of resources and themes associated with the route and to design the alternatives. The firm Goody, Clancy & Associates and historian Robert A. Selig, Ph.D., will assist with the study. We have begun assessing the scope of the inventory and have conducted some preliminary site visits. Early in 2002, we plan to hold a series of public meetings to further introduce the study and solicit input from interested parties.

A first phase of the study culminates in November 2002, when the NPS Advisory Board determines whether the route is nationally significant. If it is not, we will assess non-federal alternatives: partnerships with state and local governments, private groups and non-profit organizations, to preserve the memory of the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route. The study will assess how much of their armies' march to independence can be revealed through extant resources, enjoyed through interpretation and connected to existing recreational amenities.

We welcome the participation of all interested parties in this study. A website will be created to solicit comments and information, and report on the progress of the study. In the meantime, a link to preliminary information on the project has been established from the National Park Service's Revolutionary War website (www.nps.gov/revwar/). Information about the National Trails System is available at www.ncrc.nps.gov/programs/nts/.

For more information on the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route Study, or to send names and addresses of stakeholders for our mailing list, please contact Brian Aviles, Project Manager at (617) 223-5319, or Brian_Aviles@nps.gov.

Thank you for your interest in the study.

Sincerely,

Lawrence D. Gall
Team Leader, Stewardship & Partnership

French General Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, Comte de Rochambeau, sailed into Newport in July of 1780 with an army of 5,000 officers and men. After wintering in Newport, Rochambeau's army marched through Rhode Island and Connecticut, in June and July of 1781, and joined General George Washington's Continental Army in Phillipsburg, New York. Abandoning the idea of attacking New York, held by the British under General Clinton, they devised instead a southern campaign to attack General Cornwallis in Virginia. In August and September, Washington's and Rochambeau's armies marched through New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia, reaching Williamsburg in late September. Together they attacked and held under siege the British-fortified town of Yorktown. A French fleet under the command of Admiral De Grasse blocked the Chesapeake Bay to either reinforcement from New York or sea escape from Yorktown. On October 19, 1781, after three weeks of siege, General Cornwallis surrendered to General Washington, marking Yorktown as one of the most decisive American victories in the War for Independence. Rochambeau and his army wintered in Williamsburg, then marched back in the summer of 1782. While small contingents stayed in different ports and left for France the following year, the bulk of Rochambeau's army sailed from Boston on Christmas Eve 1782. In all, nine colonies formed the route and supported the march, providing ports, roads, camp sites, officers' lodging, provisions of food and supplies. These colonies are today the states of Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and Massachusetts.